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ABSTRACT

With the growing technological, economic and political interdependence between nations, the word "community" has come to have international implications. In order to alleviate American ignorance about other nations and global issues, community colleges must institutionalize international perspectives into their curricula. More than 50% of all foreign undergraduate students are enrolled at community colleges, and these students are an untapped resource for promoting cultural awareness on campus and in the surrounding community. Rockland Community College (RCC) and Brevard Community College encourage foreign students to offer tutoring in their native languages and advice on travel to their homelands. Community college curricula can be internationalized through specifically designed courses or through the incorporation of lectures or assignments on global themes into existing courses. The nursing department at RCC, for example, has added a cross-cultural perspective to its curriculum by exposing students to local immigrant populations and the health issues affecting them. Some colleges bring an international flavor into their curricula through foreign language courses or study abroad programs. Work-study abroad programs offer career-oriented students a chance to gain employment experience and contacts while exploring another country. Another important aspect of an international curriculum is broadening the outlook of faculty and staff. This can be accomplished through travel study programs, faculty exchanges, and college consortia. The soundest advice for colleges attempting to internationalize their curricula is to relate new international ventures to the existing resources, programs, and mission of the college. (JMC)

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ERIC DIGEST

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Internationalizing the Community College: Examples of Success

by Grace Quimbita

With the world becoming more technologically, economically, and politically interdependent, the word "community" no longer applies only to neighbors citywide but to neighbors worldwide. Community colleges must share responsibility for alleviating the ignorance of the U. S. population about other nations and global issues by institutionalizing international perspectives.

Shannon defines international education as "any activity which fosters an awareness of problems of transnational or transcultural significance and encourages understanding of other nations, peoples, and cultures" (Adams and Earwood, 1982). These goals can be accomplished by encouraging foreign students to serve as campus resources for cultural awareness; supporting foreign language studies; sending students abroad; and encouraging international/intercultural awareness among faculty, administrators, and staff.

Foreign Students

More than 50% of all foreign undergraduate students are enrolled at community colleges (Backman, 1984). These students are an untapped resource for promoting cultural awareness on campus and in the surrounding community. Rockland Community College and Brevard Community College encourage foreign students to offer tutoring in their native languages and advice on travel to their homelands, meet with community groups, and promote contacts for student or faculty exchanges (Krasno, 1985).

Before seeking to enroll large numbers of foreign students, community colleges should ensure that a reliable support system is in place. Many international students are unprepared to cope with American customs and cultural differences. At Pima Community College, this potential problem is averted by requiring all full-time international students to take a cross-cultural course which examines cultural similarities and differences between the U.S. and selected foreign countries. In addition, the college has produced a "Foreign Student Handbook," which answers questions about studying abroad and American customs (Gleazer, 1989).

Internationalizing the Curriculum

The infusion of international content into community college curricula can be accomplished through specially designed courses or the incorporation of lectures or assignments on global themes into existing courses. For example, Broward Community College has redirected its graduation requirements to those courses offering an international perspective (Greene, 1985). Raritan Valley College bases certain remedial writing course assignments on students' interviews with guest lecturers specializing in international education (Salas, 1989). The nursing department at Rockland Community College has added a cross-cultural perspective to its curriculum by exposing students to local immigrant populations and the health problems particular to those groups (Berry, 1986).

Foreign Languages

If there is any course that is 100% international in content, it is the foreign language course. Bergen Community College is one of the few two-year institutions that continue to require all associate of arts and many associate of science students to take a modern foreign language. Courses in French, German, Modern Hebrew, Italian, Japanese, Russian, and Spanish are available (Backman, 1984).

Rockland Community College's Self-Study Language Service offers independent study materials and native-speaking tutors for more than 40 languages. The program serves almost 400 Rockland students each year, as well as corporations interested in intercultural training for employees (Berry, 1984). The Center for Slavic and Eastern European Studies at Ohio State University has joined with local community colleges in another innovative approach. Students are able to call a toll-free number to speak or listen to a foreign language (O'Sullivan, 1987).

Study Abroad Programs

A relatively small number of community colleges offer students the opportunity to travel abroad, typically as part of short-cycle study tours, work-study abroad programs, or semester-year abroad programs. Short-term study tours usually take place during a semester break or summer vacation. Typically, an enthusiastic faculty member takes a group of students and community members to a foreign country to study a particular topic unique to that area. Raritan Valley Community College's study tour of the Yucatan Peninsula provides a less typical example. This interdisciplinary effort was organized by a historian, a foreign language specialist, and an anthropologist (Salas, 1988).

To assist faculty members in initiating successful travel programs, the Los Angeles Community College District has compiled "A Guide to the International Education Program," which offers advice on planning a travel study class (Culton, 1981).

Work-study abroad programs offer career-oriented students a chance to gain employment experience and contacts, while exploring another country. Lansing Community College has established a cooperative agreement with Biwako Kisen Steamship Company in Japan. The program allows U.S. students to become proficient in the Japanese language and study Japanese culture and society, as employees of the firm (Gleazer, 1989).

The benefits of a semester or year abroad have long been recognized, but frequently costs are prohibitive for two-year college students. These programs can be made more affordable when operated as student exchanges. Student exchange programs no longer focus exclusively on liberal arts students, but are currently involving students in such programs as international business, criminal justice, hotel technology, and culinary arts (O'Sullivan, 1987).

Faculty, Administrator, and Staff Development

An important part of internationalizing the community college is broadening the outlook of faculty and staff. There are several ways this can be accomplished. Travel study programs offer faculty as well as students insights into the culture, economy, and politics of other countries, and faculty exchanges can revitalize faculty and encourage them to infuse international topics into their courses. Williamsport Area Community College in Pennsylvania recently sponsored a South American Field Experience Program for its personnel. During the trip, each participant focused on a specific personal goal, ranging from a botanical study of regional plants to a study of the culinary arts of the region (Martin, 1988).

College consortia provide important support for community colleges interested in becoming involved in international education efforts. They promote faculty training, maintain ongoing relations with international agencies, sponsor exchange programs, and conduct symposia. Cost sharing in activities such as study-abroad programs, faculty training, and program development may be critical to the ability of smaller colleges to become active participants. The Northwest International Education Association has a catalog of 190 courses and instructional packages to help instructors teach with an international perspective (Gleazer, 1988).

Conclusion

Though many community colleges have made great progress toward internationalizing their campuses, fully 80% of the two-year colleges in the country have yet to take their first step. Gleazer recommends the following strategies to initiate or expand the internationalization process. He urges colleges to involve the president, board members, and faculty; provide faculty with released time and funds for curriculum and professional development; establish a college-wide international committee; and appoint a director of international education. He also stresses that colleges identify and utilize community resources; develop links with foreign institutions to encourage faculty, administrator, and student exchanges, as well as exchanges in technical expertise, art, and other fields; and participate in sister city or sister state arrangements. Gleazer's final and most important recommendation is to relate new international ventures to the existing resources, programs and mission of the college.

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